



Media Release

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AFN welcomes Business Council support for a Modern Slavery Act

The Chair of the Australian Freedom Network (AFN), former Salvation Army Commissioner James Condon has welcomed the Business Council of Australia's support for an Act of Parliament to discourage slavery-like work conditions.

"I congratulate the BCA on its stance," said Mr Condon. "The good will of Australian business is crucial in ridding our country - and the world of modern slavery."

"Businesses are the best equipped to monitor and take responsibility for their supply chains, so today's announcement by the BCA is a significant breakthrough.

"Thousands of people in Australia and millions across our region are in situations of modern slavery right now.

"They are victims of forced labour, debt bondage, human trafficking and more.

"We are all morally obliged to take whatever steps we can to ensure that the way we do business isn't making someone else's life a misery."

The BCA says "we strongly believe that Australia needs a comprehensive approach, including legislation, to combat modern slavery in all its forms. Increased global trade has delivered great benefits for Australians, but it has also increased the risk that products and services have been tainted by the use of forced labour."

The BCA announcement came as the Australian Parliament's Human Rights Sub-Committee prepares to hear an inquiry about whether a Modern Slavery Act similar to one in operation in the UK in 2015, could also be effective in Australia.

The UK legislation extended greater protections to victims of modern slavery and established an independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner position.

It also requires medium to large businesses to publish an annual statement on the steps they've taken to ensure that slavery and human trafficking are not taking place in their supply chain - or to declare that no steps to confirm the existence of slavery or trafficking have been taken. The UK Home Office maintains a public register of the statements made by more than 10,000 companies in an open data register.

British Prime Minister Theresa May has called modern slavery "the great human rights issue of our time", set up a Cabinet taskforce to tackle the issue and directed around \$60 million of the UK aid budget to fund anti-slavery initiatives overseas.

"The 18 national faith leaders in the Australian Freedom Network believe our country does need a Modern Slavery Act, which is why we to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull last December to call for one," said Mr Condon.

"We are very grateful that Mr Turnbull and Attorney-General Senator George Brandis have listened and advanced this proposal.

“Today I restate our faith leaders’ request that the Australian Government adopt world’s best practice legislation to ensure the supply chains of Australian businesses are transparent and free of unethical exploitation or slavery-like practices.”

“Australians simply must be assured that the goods they consume and the services they use are not produced on the back of slave labour,” said James Condon.

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